

BRITISH RAILWAYS AND THE WAR

by
F. A. McKenzie



British Port : British Troops Departing for, German Prisoners Arriving from, the Front.

LONDON:

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1917



**BRITISH RAILWAYS
AND THE WAR**

With the Compliments
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LONDON, S.W. 1,
ENGLAND.



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BRITISH railways have played a great and splendid part in the war. Working with depleted staffs under war conditions, they have enabled England to move millions of men and millions of tons of munitions with the utmost rapidity and with an entire absence of confusion. They have met to the full every demand. They have sent their trained workers to the colours by the many score of thousands. They have torn up their lines and given their locomotives and rolling stock for the service of the Army in France. Sinking ancient rivalries, they have come together, working as one for the common good. The Government took control of the lines when hostilities began, but Government control merely provided the agency through which the railwaymen themselves rallied to employ their resources as an effective instrument of war.

The British and German railway organisations before the war presented a striking contrast. German railways were almost wholly State owned. Many of them were built primarily for purposes not of commerce, but of strategy. To the German Great General Staff the railway was one of the foundations of national war preparation. The railway staffs were selected from the Army, and were virtually managed as a branch of

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the central military organisation. The very railway cars were built to a size that could be employed for transporting the maximum number of men. Goods trucks were planned so as to be suitable when the moment came for the carriage of guns and war material.

The British railways were privately owned, and were built solely for commercial purposes. The control of the principal lines was divided between forty companies. These maintained only a minimum of co-operation among themselves, and wherever they ran through the same territory there was keen rivalry. British lines were laid, the size of railway carriages and goods trucks decided, and the staffs selected solely for the ordinary work of peace time. It was the business of the railways to provide for the needs of the communities they served and to obtain a fair return for their shareholders, and nothing else. They were peace lines laid down not where strategy dictated, but where business was likely to be best.

One thing, however, had been done, a thing that was to prove of vital importance when war broke out. In 1871, following the Franco-Prussian conflict, the British Government took power by Act of Parliament to acquire by Royal Proclamation any or all of the railways of the United Kingdom in time of war. A committee of railway managers was already in existence to deal with such a situation. This body, known first as the War Railway Council and afterwards as the

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Railway Executive Committee, was to act as a central organisation, to give instructions, and to co-ordinate the activities of the different railways in war time. Working in co-operation with it was the Engineer and Railway Staff Corps—a volunteer organisation of railway workers whose purpose was to develop schemes, methods, and personnel for the War Railway Service. It was composed of general managers of the leading railways, leading contractors, engineers, and other railwaymen.

Month by month, and year by year, the Staff Corps worked out schemes for the utilisation of our lines under any contingency. It planned how to carry out great movements of troops from one part to the other. Few, if any, then contemplated more than handling bodies of men running into a total figure of from four to five hundred thousand. When, later, the needs of the war raised the total to ten times the old maximum, the plans proved to have been so soundly laid that the greater demands were easily met.

The Railway Executive Committee and the Railway Staff Corps, working in conjunction with the Director-General of Military Transport, gradually completed, during the years preceding the war, their plans of operations. These covered more especially the movements of a British expeditionary force to its embarkation port, the quick concentration of men at any point to repel an invading army, and the evacuation of invaded districts. By 1912 all was in readiness. Every

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railway manager had in his safe a confidential, sealed, unopened document, detailing a scheme of mobilisation. In it he was told exactly what to do, the trains to be moved, their starting-points and destinations, and the entire schedule of running, if war came. So far as the operation of our railways was concerned, England was prepared.

THE MEANING OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL

On the same day that war was declared (August 4th, 1914) the railways of England, Wales, and Scotland—not Ireland—were taken over by the Government. The managers opened their sealed instructions and proceeded to carry them out. It had been provided in the Act of 1871 that full compensation should be paid to the owners for any loss incurred. The Government, however, did not at the beginning announce any terms with the companies. This was left for a later date. Government control, it is important to note, did not mean Government ownership. The lines remained the property of the companies. They retained the management of their own concerns, subject to the instructions of the Executive Committee, and the whole machinery of administration went on as before. The sole purpose at the beginning was to facilitate the movements of troops. But as the war developed, as economy became more and more

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essential, the scope of the Railway Executive Committee, now in supreme control, became greatly extended.

The official chairman of the Railway Executive Committee was the President of the Board of Trade, but the real presiding chief was the acting chairman, Mr. H. A. (afterwards Sir Herbert) Walker, general manager of the London and South-Western Railway. Working in co-operation with the acting chairman were twelve general managers of leading British lines. They were Mr. J. A. F. Aspinall, of the Lancashire and Yorkshire; Mr. Guy Calthrop, of the London and North-Western; Mr. C. H. Dent, of the Great Northern; Mr. (afterwards Sir) F. H. Dent, of the South-Eastern and Chatham; Sir Sam Fay, of the Great Central; Mr. (afterwards Sir) William Forbes, of the London, Brighton, and South Coast; Sir Guy Granet, of the Midland; Sir A. Kaye-Butterworth, of the North-Eastern; Mr. Donald A. Matheson, of the Caledonian; Sir Robert Turnbull, of the London and North-Western; and Mr. A. Watson (assistant to general manager), Lancashire and Yorkshire. The secretary was Mr. Gilbert L. Szlumper. Under the central body were groups of committees, each made up of railway experts. The War Office and the Director-General of Transport were in touch with the Central Committee. There was a constant interchange of ideas, but from the beginning there was no attempt to supersede the railwaymen in carrying out their work.

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The main plans of the war policy of the railways had, of course, to be approved by the Government, and announcements were made in the name of the President of the Board of Trade. But the plan uniformly adopted was for the authorities to tell the Railway Executive Committee what had to be done, and then to leave it to plan the details of how the work should be completed. In other words, the experts were allowed to carry out their own work in their own way, so far as was possible, under war conditions. And they got the thing done. Sir Guy Granet, general manager of the Midland Railway, became Deputy Director-General of Military Railways in the War Office. Mr. Eric C. Geddes, deputy general manager of the North-Eastern Railway, was appointed Deputy Director-General of Munitions Supply; he was knighted in 1916, and made Director-General of Movements and Railways, and Director-General of Communications in France. His history from then is one of the romances of the war. Having done great work on the railways at the front, he moved to the Admiralty, where he shortly became First Civil Lord and a member of the Government. He was succeeded at the War Office by Sir Guy Granet. Sir Sam Fay assumed responsibility in the War Office for the directorate of movements. Mr. Thornton, general manager of the Great Eastern Railway, became Hon. Lieut.-Colonel of the Engineer and Railway Staff Corps, and Deputy Director of Inland Waterways and Docks.

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The first task before the Committee was one calculated to tax its resources to the full. The Territorials—the volunteer forces of the United Kingdom—had been called to the Colours, and had to be distributed to their training grounds and their defence areas all over the country. Simultaneously the Expeditionary Force, numbering 120,000 men, with a vast amount of material of war, had to be transported in a minimum of time to Southampton—the port of embarkation for France.

SEVENTY-THREE TRAINS IN FOURTEEN HOURS

The Government gave the railways a time-limit of sixty hours to make ready for dispatch to Southampton of 350 trains of about 30 vehicles each. In addition, close on 1,200 other trains were necessary for conveying the equipment, munitions, and food supplies of the forces. There were about 60,000 horses to be carried—7 to a truck; there were 5,000 tons of baggage and 6,000 vehicles. Sir Herbert Walker, over whose system—the London and South-Western Railway—the trains had to travel to Southampton, described what was done in a speech shortly afterwards at the American Luncheon Club in London. He told of the Government time-limit of sixty hours. “We ‘delivered the goods,’ as you Americans would say, in forty-eight hours. At Southampton, for practically every day of the

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first three weeks of the war, we handled during a period of fourteen hours no fewer than 73 of these trains, including the running of them to the boat side and the unloading of the full equipment of guns, ammunition, and horses.

"The trains arrived at intervals averaging twelve minutes. It was a matter of special pride to all the railway men concerned—and we general managers give credit for the feat to the efficiency of our disciplined staffs—that practically every train without exception came in to scheduled time. Some of them came from remote parts of the kingdom—Wales and the North of Scotland."

Among the audience on that occasion was Mr. (afterwards Lieut.-Colonel) H. W. Thornton, general manager of the Great Eastern Railway, a distinguished American railway organiser, who had come to England from the United States. He said that so far as his knowledge of great transportation achievements went, there was no event in railway history to compare with what the British lines had accomplished in that month of August, 1914. Certainly in America, the land of "big stunts," there had never been anything like it. It may be added that this rapid transportation of the troops to Southampton was only possible because the docks there had been carefully planned by the railway company for the handling of large masses of men and quantities of material. The trains conveying the troops and freight were run right down to one of the berthing stations; they were emptied there with the

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greatest expedition, and at once sent back. Each train had a permanently displayed index number on it, by which it was known throughout its journeys; its exact time of arrival and departure at each place were scheduled, and the schedule had to be kept. What is still more noteworthy is that while this rapid concentration of troops was proceeding at Southampton the ordinary traffic of the railways was maintained with comparatively little alteration. Here and there a section of line was closed for a few hours, particularly sections of some of the junction lines across London; but the general public scarcely realised what was happening. Such precautions were taken that even the elaborate espionage system maintained at that time by Germany in England failed to convey to the enemy full details of what was going on. The British Army had landed in France and was marching into Flanders before the Germans realised where they had landed or what their numbers were.

"The railway companies," said Lord Kitchener, three weeks after the outbreak of war, "in the all-important matter of transport facilities have more than justified the complete confidence reposed in them by the War Office, all grades of railway service having laboured with untiring energy and patience."

The terms under which the railways were being taken over for the period of the war were published in September. The Government guaranteed to the proprietors of the railways that their net

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revenue should be the same as in 1913, except when the net receipts for the first half of 1914 were less than the first half of 1913 ; in that case the sum payable was to be reduced in the same proportion. The entire Government traffic—men and freight—was to be carried without any direct charge being made for it or any accounts rendered. This plan was considered satisfactory by both sides. In the majority of cases there had been a reduction of earnings in the first half of 1914 over the previous half-year, and companies were contemplating a still further reduction. The interests of their shareholders being assured, they were able to devote themselves to the work of economical and efficient distribution, quite apart from the usual financial problems. The one weak side of this agreement was that it made no allowances to cover increased interest payments on account of new investments, new capital expenditure since the war began. This point was afterwards met by an arrangement that the Government should pay interest at 4 per cent. on all new capital invested by the railways since August 4, 1914, on new lines, branches, terminals, equipment, or other facilities put into use since January 1, 1913.

SOME EFFECTS OF COMBINED ACTION

The conclusion of the financial agreement between the Government and the companies automatically brought about a great economy in

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the system of railway accounts. Hundreds of clerks had been employed at the Railway Clearing House at Euston, London, in dissecting payments covering different lines, so that each line should have its proper share. This work was no longer required. The vast amount of competition maintained before the war for traffic at once ceased. British railways, particularly those competing with others for the business of particular towns, had maintained staffs of canvassers not only for freight, but even for passenger traffic. Their competition went so far that, in some cases, if it was announced that a visitor was coming to one of the Midland towns he would promptly receive at his home address callers on behalf of rival railways asking him to buy his ticket by their line. There was still more acute canvassing for goods traffic. All the great companies had extensive publicity departments, which, by posters, pamphlets, and newspaper articles, sought to bring home to people generally the attractions of their lines. In the years before the war this publicity had tended to grow more and more elaborate and more and more costly. Now it was swept away at a stroke. The weekly traffic returns of the different lines were no longer required, and so ceased to be published. The reports of the companies were cut down to a bare minimum, and in many cases even these reduced reports were not sent to the shareholders unless they specially asked for them. The tickets issued by various companies for the same points were made for a time available by the trains of

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any railway running between the points to which the tickets were issued. This concession was shortly afterwards withdrawn.

The great strain of the dispatch of the first Expeditionary Force passed, but it soon became clear that the railways would be faced by a double problem. They would all the time have a vast amount of military traffic to handle—the transference of troops, the carriage of munitions, the assembling of different sections of war material. Simultaneously with this great increase of work, they had a very serious reduction of staff. A number of railwaymen had been called up at once as Army Reservists and Territorials, while many others volunteered to join the Colours. It was estimated a few months after the outbreak of war that 66,000 men, out of a total of 643,135, had joined the Army. This figure rapidly grew, until at the end of 1916 nearly 150,000 men had been released by the railways for war duty—close on 50 per cent. of the men of military age. This shortage of labour quickly grew into one of the most serious issues. The companies had no desire to keep back recruits from the Army, but they realised that it was essential for the welfare of the nation that the railways should be maintained in an efficient manner and be prepared to meet any military demands which might be placed on them. The King, in a message to the skilled workers in the shipbuilding and armament firms, emphasised this latter point in words that applied equally to

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railway workers: "His Majesty greatly admires that spirit of patriotism which arouses in them (the skilled workmen) the desire to enlist and fight at the front, but His Majesty wishes to remind them that by work that they alone can most successfully carry out they are assisting in the prosecution of the war equally with their comrades serving by land or sea."

The Railway Executive Committee, which now was the main body for making financial arrangements, announced that the railway companies had arranged to supplement the Army pay and allowances of Army Reservists and Territorials in the railway service who joined the Colours in such a manner that the families would be maintained in circumstances which should avoid hardships, during the absence of the breadwinner of the family. Certain privileges, such as the supply of cheap coal, would be continued. Occupants of the companies' houses would not be disturbed, and when the men returned positions would be found for them on the railways equal to those they formerly occupied. The general plan adopted was to make a grant to augment the income of the wife and family to at least four-fifths of the man's standard wage.

THE COMPANIES AND THEIR STAFFS

At the time of the outbreak of war the railway companies and the men's unions—the National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society

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of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen---were engaged in a controversy on the question of wages. A railway conciliation scheme drafted by a Royal Commission had come into operation early in 1912. This was to continue until November 6, 1914, but either side could terminate it on or after that date by twelve months' notice. The men had given notice in November, 1913, to withdraw; they wanted the conditions revised. When war broke out the negotiations between both sides were in a very forward state. A temporary arrangement was arrived at in October, 1914, by which the conciliation scheme was to be continued, but to be terminable by either side at six weeks' notice. Many railway employees were convinced that since the Government was now virtually in control of their lines their demands for increased wages should be met. The rapid rise in the cost of living had made it obvious, after a time, that something must be done. The railway companies felt that, from their point of view, any rise in wages, even though wholly or mainly made by the Government, might have the serious result of putting on them a heavy burden to be borne after the war and after private ownership was resumed. It is always difficult to reduce wages, whatever the conditions may have been under which they are raised.

On February 13, 1915, terms of settlement were arranged. A weekly bonus was to be paid to all wage-earning employees of eighteen years old and

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upwards engaged in the manipulation of traffic ; all whose standard rate of wages was under 30s. a week were to receive a weekly bonus of 3s., and those earning 30s. or more were to be paid 2s. The cost of this bonus was divided, one-quarter being paid by the companies and three-quarters by the Government. Modifications of the original agreement between the Government and the railway companies were made in order that this might be done. This agreement was revised afterwards in 1915, and in its final form all employees of eighteen years or upwards were given a bonus of 5s. per week, those of under eighteen 2s. 6d. The understanding at the time was that this arrangement was finally to settle the wages question until the end of the war. A definite undertaking was given on that point by the men's organisations :—

The National Union of Railwaymen and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen undertake that during the pendency of this agreement they will not present to the railway companies any fresh demands for increased bonus or wages, or general alterations in conditions of service, and that they will not give countenance or support either to a demand on the part of any of their members to reopen the settlement now made or any strike that might be entered upon in furtherance of such demand.

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Here, however, war conditions proved a stronger factor than formal agreements. The cost of living generally, and particularly the cost of food, continued to mount up. A second war bonus of 5s. was added to the first, coming into force in September, 1916, and in April, 1917, a further agreement was come to between the Railway Executive Committee and the various trade unions of the men by which the war bonus was increased to 15s. per week for all employees over eighteen and 7s. 6d. per week for those below that age. It was estimated that the total additional expenditure on account of the war bonus would be £23,000,000. The whole of these latter increases were borne by the Government.

These rapid rises in the wages paid to the men came in for much criticism. It was pointed out that the increase of 1916 was nearly equal to wiping out the dividends on the ordinary stock. The *Railway Magazine* declared: "Under no other system but State control would a war bonus be paid on an all-round basis alike to lads of eighteen years of age and the oldest employee, and single and married men placed on the same plane, no matter what may be their financial responsibilities or comparative wages." But here certain considerations have to be borne in mind. This rise in wages was not peculiar to the railways, but was general in industry. The railwaymen under the war labour regulations were not to leave their employment for other work. It was felt that they could not

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reasonably be expected to continue under far lower wages than other men in allied industries in the same districts. Above all, there was the outstanding fact that the old scale of wages was inadequate under war prices. The average cost of food of the kind mainly purchased by working men had doubled; clothing was much dearer; all the incidental expenses of living, except rent and rates, had gone up; and men could not maintain their families decently on the old wage scale. The idea of making the rise the same for all ranks was to benefit most those who needed it most—the lowest paid men.

Up to the beginning of the war British railways had been very reluctant to employ women labour, even for office details. Booking clerks, head office staff, ticket collectors, attendants in dining-cars, were in nearly every case men. But the shortage of men and the desire to release as many as possible for service with the Colours caused the introduction of women workers early in 1915. The experiment was a great success. Women were employed on an ever-growing scale, not only for purely clerical duties, but for manual work of many kinds. Soon everywhere there were women cleaners, women porters, women ticket collectors, women booking clerks, and many others besides. The trade unions pressed for a definite understanding about the wages the women were to receive, and further asked for assurances that the employment of women in capacities where they were not formerly employed was an

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emergency action arising out of circumstances created by the war, and would not prejudice in any way the undertaking given by the railway companies as to the re-employment of men who had joined the Colours, on the conclusion of the war. The pay of women in grades in which they were not engaged in August, 1914, was fixed at the minimum pay of the grade. At first women were not granted a war bonus ; but in November, 1916, it was arranged that women of eighteen years of age and over should be given a bonus of 3s. a week and those under eighteen years of age 1s. 6d. This amount was later increased to 5s. 6d. a week for the seniors and 2s. 9d. for the juniors.

No statements have been issued showing the final balance-sheet of the railways under Government administration, and any such statement would be very difficult to make out, since a vast quantity of Government traffic not credited under the war arrangements would have to be charged up in attempting to make any fair balance-sheet.

In December, 1916, Mr. Bonar Law, speaking officially in the House of Commons, said that the Government agreement with the railway companies, notwithstanding the grant of the war bonus to railway employees, had "involved no financial loss, but probably some gain." When we contrast the working of the railways under Government supervision with the working of the British shipping independently, the gains of the

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Government control become evident. The railways under Government direction kept freights even, directed their operations on an organised plan, gave undue profits to no man, and were worked for the sole purpose of benefiting the country. The merchant shipping trade, left largely under private control, was used in many directions for the accumulation of individual fortunes—fortunes earned out of the necessities of the community.

The era of economy in administration extended. At first the railway companies, believing that the war would possibly be short, attempted to carry on as usual, to maintain as many of their ordinary services as they could, and to give the public all the facilities to which they had been accustomed in days of peace. After a time it became evident that this course was impossible. Step by step, restrictions came in force. Restaurant and sleeping car services were cut down or suspended altogether. Excursion and week-end tickets, formerly a very prominent feature in British railways, ceased. The service of passenger trains was reduced. Minor stations were closed, and some branch lines were abandoned. The "luggage in advance" system, by which passengers could send their luggage on a small payment before they themselves left and have it delivered by the railway company to their destination, was ended, and passengers were asked to take as little baggage as possible. Later on passenger

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baggage was definitely limited to 100 lb. per head.

FURTHER BENEFITS OF THE "POOL"

Among the most important economies in handling traffic was, first, the establishment of the common user of railway companies' open goods wagons. Under the old system the wagon received loaded by one company from another had to be promptly returned to the owning line, even though there was no freight for it on its return. Under the common user arrangement it became available for loading in any direction, thus reducing the haulage of empty vehicles to a minimum. This system of pooling luggage cars came into force on January 2, 1917. The pool did not include the very large number of privately owned wagons, estimated from 600,000 to 700,000, which are a distinct feature of British railways; but the benefits of the pool were soon seen to be so real that steps were pushed forward to take over the control of the private wagons also.

A minor economy introduced early in the war was an agreement by the railways to accept each other's "paid" and "to pay" stamps and labels on parcel traffic. This saved very much labour, and it led to a further development in January, 1917, when the Railway Executive Committee announced that from a given date "the carriage charges for all descriptions of traffic for convey-

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ance by passenger train or other similar service must be paid by the sender at the forwarding station." The whole system of bills and accounts for passenger goods traffic was thus swept away. Some reformers even proposed that the railways should go further, and insist upon the prepayment of all small traffic by goods trains. Still another step was a decision that claimants for the loss or damage of goods traffic should be dealt with by the company on which the claim was made without any division, such as had formerly taken place, of the amount paid between the companies concerned in the route over which the traffic had been conveyed.

The saving in printed matter was so extensive that at least one large company was able to turn out many tons of paper which had been stored for office use and to put this on the market at a time when paper was scarcest.

In January, 1917, in addition to the changes already described, passenger rates were raised 50 per cent., and Irish railways, which had formerly been outside the Government control, were taken into it. The rise in passenger rates was instituted not to increase revenue, but to reduce the amount of travelling. The British authorities openly appealed to the people not to travel except when necessary. It was urged on the public in every way possible that pleasure travelling under existing conditions was unpatriotic. The railwaymen were wanted for other work. Thus at the Christmas season of

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1916 the Board of Trade issued an appeal as follows :—

CHRISTMAS TRAINS.

JOURNEYS OF REAL URGENCY ONLY.

The Board of Trade desire to urge upon the general public the necessity of avoiding all travelling by train at Christmas time.

No journey which is NOT of REAL URGENCY should be undertaken, and the public are warned that the passenger train service during the Christmas Holidays will be greatly reduced in comparison with previous years, and that the Railway Companies cannot undertake to CONVEY PASSENGERS to ANY PARTICULAR DESTINATION. The Military Authorities propose to restrict the leave of soldiers stationed in this country, and, in the interests of the nation, civilians should regard themselves as under a like restraint. Soldiers on leave from the front will be given a preference over other passengers.

The increase in passenger fares did not apply to workmen's tickets, season tickets, traders' tickets, or zone tickets, nor to the local traffic in towns. Moreover, shortly afterwards the Board of Trade announced that the increase of 50 per cent. would not apply to tickets issued to relatives desiring to visit wounded soldiers or sailors in hospitals, on producing the hospital authority to do so. The rise was generally borne with equanimity, but it caused some protests. One deputation appealed to the Railway Executive Committee for consideration in the matter of railway fares for watering-places and health resorts. The deputation was told that, so far from the increase

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being modified, a still further increase might be necessary in the future.

TRANSPORTING STOCK TO THE WAR ZONE

Late in 1916 a fresh consideration came to the fore. In the early stages of the war the British had relied mainly for the transport of their goods in France on the service of large numbers of powerful motor wagons. Experience proved that while a motor service might answer as a temporary measure for a comparatively small body of men, it was impossible to provide for very large armies by road traffic. It was particularly impossible to bring forward with sufficient rapidity the enormous quantities of shells required and the numerous heavy guns without the use of properly built railroads. The companies could not well manufacture afresh the rails, locomotives, and rolling stock necessary, or educate outside men to operate them in France. To meet this situation large sections of line were torn up in England and sent over to France, and every spare locomotive and spare bit of rolling stock was also sent over. These rails were quickly laid down by the Railroad Construction Corps, drawn largely from railroad builders from the Dominion of Canada. The new lines were operated by the Railroad Corps, recruited from practical British railwaymen. This of necessity still further reduced travelling facilities in England. Speaking at

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Carnarvon on February 3, 1917, the Prime Minister dealt with this matter :—

“ The Germans discovered early in the war that the railways are a great military machine. As usual, we come a little later.

“ When I was Secretary of State for War one of my first duties was to appoint a great railway manager to take over the question of railway transport. The Commander-in-Chief in France not merely welcomed his appointment, but instantly appointed him as chief railway representative behind the lines. He is one of the ablest railway men in the world, and the railway system there has been taken in hand. But you needed locomotives, you needed wagons, you needed drivers, you needed steel rails, and even if these had been times of peace you could not have had them without taking no end of time in manufacturing for a great demand of that kind. The President of the Board of Trade had to take the matter in hand. He thought it was common knowledge that there was infinitely more travelling on the part of the general public in this country than in any fighting country in the world—non-essential travelling—and he advised these restrictions in order to cut down unnecessary travelling.

“ What has been the result ? He has already saved hundreds of locomotives—I could tell you how many—for the Army in France, and their drivers are volunteering to go there. The Union of Railway Servants has been extremely helpful to us in engaging them. He saved tens of thousands of wagons ; he saved scores of

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thousands of tons of steel rails, that we could not possibly get manufactured for at least a year, and not even then except at the expense of steel, which we required for building against submarines. Now this is what I want to put to you. The next time you find that the timetable is inconvenient to you, the next time you have got to pay an extra fare, do not forget you are helping the Army in France by that means more than if you had sent three fresh army corps there. Those are some of the things that we want the public to do."

Still further economies were necessary. The men organising the railway services of the country ever kept in mind the purpose of effecting these economies with the minimum of inconvenience to the public. In July, 1917, an important scheme, going far beyond anything yet attempted, was announced for the coal trade. The carriage of coal was one of the big problems of the railways, for it involved much labour. In the winter of 1916-7, owing partly to delays in railway transit and partly to difficulties in local delivery, considerable numbers of people—particularly the poor—had been unable to obtain supplies of coal with any regularity. It was feared that conditions might be still worse in the approaching winter. This the authorities planned to prevent.

The Controller of Coal Mines published a scheme, dated July 4, 1917, for the purpose of reorganising the transport of coal by railway for inland consumption. Under this scheme England,

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Wales, and Scotland were divided out into twenty areas, and each area had to take its supplies from certain fixed districts of production. It was estimated that the plan would effect a saving in railway transport of not less than 700 million ton miles annually. The scheme was based on four main issues :—

(1) That consumption of coal should take place as near the producing point as possible ;

(2) That in view of the superior facilities offered by the main traffic lines the movement of traffic should follow these routes wherever possible ;

(3) That the movement of coal should, as far as possible, be in well-defined directions—north to south, north to south-east, north to south-west, east to west ;

(4) That an area producing less coal than suffices for its own need should not send any portion of its output to other areas. That an area producing more coal than it requires for consumption within the area itself should only distribute to adjacent or convenient areas.

This scheme did not affect water-borne coal, anthracite, or coke of any description.

It was the precursor of other schemes which were to reduce unnecessary traffic in goods to the minimum.

No description of the work of the British railways in the war would be complete without some reference to the service in handling the wounded.

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Soon after the outbreak of hostilities several of the railway companies began the construction of special ambulance trains. One of the first of these was equipped at the Great Eastern Works at Stratford. It was made up from vehicles taken from service, and consisted of eight cars. The first was a five-compartment brake composite. The guard's compartment was fitted up as a mess-room for doctors and nurses, the first class compartments in it were reserved for two nurses and two doctors, and the two thirds were converted, one into a pantry, one a stores, and one as a room for two men on the staff. Next came a ward car, with one section for four officers and a ward for sixteen men. This was followed by a ward for twenty men. Then came four cars—a pharmacy car and treatment room, three more cars with wards for twenty men each—a dining car, and a last car with three third class compartments adapted each to accommodate two men, and two first class compartments converted into stores and a small guard's compartment. This was an excellent example of the quick conversion of existing stock for war purposes. Other lines did much the same.

As soon as possible special trains were built, new throughout, for hospital requirements, and were put on the line both in England and in France. One excellent example of the kind used in England was built by the Brighton Railway. It consisted of sixteen bogie coaches, two kitchen cars, a pharmacy car, four ward cars, five sitting-up cars

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(one for infectious cases), a staff car, a personnel car, and two brake vans. Accommodation was provided for 144 beds and 384 sitting-up cases. The train was 930 feet 8 inches long, with buffers, and it weighed 429 tons. Its equipment was the final word in comfort and convenience. The absence of vibration, the ease with which cases could be taken in and out, the facilities for carrying patients to the treatment room, and the arrangements for the staff excited the greatest admiration in the numerous places where the train was put on show before it was brought into service. Not that the Brighton Railway was exceptional in this. All the great English railway works devoted their utmost skill and care to the ambulance trains, and each pitted itself against the others in providing the best for our wounded men. He would have been a bold judge to decide which did best.

PROBLEMS AFTER THE WAR

The responsible men on our railways recognise that the problems in railway management and control raised by the war will not altogether come to an end when the war is over. A new era has begun in railway management, and it will be impossible to go back completely to pre-war conditions. Even if it were possible it would be highly undesirable. While no definite schemes have yet been arranged, it can safely be foretold that there will be greater unity of administration when peace returns than in the old days before

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war came. Co-operation has proved to be better than cut-throat competition. In the old days the Railway Clearing House at Euston provided the machinery for a limited amount of co-operation, but one dissentient could often hold up great reforms. The Railway Executive Committee of to-day is almost certain to develop into a permanent central body which will act as the coherer, the organiser, and the Supreme Court of Appeal among railways themselves, when rival schemes threaten conflict. This central body will promote economy of effort. It will prevent extravagant and excessive competition, and it will, if wisely guided, hold the scales evenly between the triple claims of the railway proprietors, the railway employees, and the general public.

The second problem is that of wages. Practical railwaymen maintain that under normal conditions it will be impossible to pay, when the companies emerge once more from Government control, anything like the war bonus of 15s. per week per man now received. Any attempt to revert to the pre-war wages would probably plunge us into a labour war. What will be a fair and practical wage for the men after the war is over? How can it be paid? If a substantial increase on the pre-war rates is found necessary—as many think it will be—how are the companies to meet it? Are they to be allowed to maintain higher passenger rates or to increase freight charges? If so, will these higher charges mean increased revenue? It is an axiom of

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management that low fares mean heavy traffic. Here is a matter which will demand the most careful consideration of both railway managements and the men's leaders.

The third problem is that of the future of women's labour on the railways. The companies have promised that men who have left them to serve with the Colours will be reinstated on their return in positions equal to those they left. That promise must be kept, and kept to the full. But, unfortunately, many of the men will never return. Women have been found such efficient railway servants that they are certain to be retained. Many branches of railway employment before the war exclusively held by men will, a few years hence, be wholly or almost wholly in women's hands. How can the change which has already taken place be made permanent without strife?

The changed conditions after the war may, of course, provide in themselves a solution for all these possible problems. In the great rush of work to be done when the world is to be repaired, when ruined countrysides are to be rebuilt, great cities re-equipped, and the waste of war made good, there will be for a time at least a demand for labour greater even than the supply afforded by a gradually demobilised army. It has been the experience of other generations that a successful nation emerging triumphantly from a hard-fought war has in itself such springs of hope, enthusiasm, and inspiration that

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the impossibilities of other days are tackled and overcome. The British railways may at least hope that, having solved the problems of war traffic and employment in unequalled fashion, they will master the lesser problems of the coming days of peace.

Of the many high tributes paid to the British railways by the responsible heads of the nation, only two need be quoted here. The first is from Sir William Robertson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, on May 12, 1917 :—

During the last five or six weeks, I suppose, we have expended some 260,000 tons of ammunition, which have had to be moved by road, rail, and sea from the factories in England to the guns in France, and man-handled probably not less than half a dozen times. As you can imagine, this has entailed a great deal of railway work at the front as well as in England, and the skilful and determined way in which the work has been executed by the railway managers and employees who have assisted us is beyond all praise.

The Earl of Selborne nearly two years earlier, on August 26, 1915, said :—

Have you thought of what the railwaymen are doing ? An immense number of men have been taken from the railways. The railways are carrying now a volume of trade such as never has been carried on our railways before, and the strain on those men is very great. That is nothing but silent heroism ; as neces-

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sary and as great a contribution to victory as the work of the seamen or the work of the soldier.

No tributes were more richly deserved.